

A tale of continuity

It is a week since little Christmas, 1912 and a January storm gathers on Ireland's Atlantic coast. In the candle-lit corner of a small West of Ireland cottage a woman:

"... falls and heaves, holding a tide of tears, A red wire of pain feeds through every vein, Until night unweaves and the child reaches dawn, Outside each other now, she sees him first, Flesh of her flesh, her dreamt son safe on earth"

However, this mother's joy was shortlived. The experience of having eight previous children told her this child was fighting for its life. The priest and the local doctor were duly summoned and after a number of hours of medical and spiritual treatment, the infant improved. So grateful was the woman that the child, George Francis O'Loughlin, was named after that doctor, George Macnamara, and that priest, Father Francis McMahon.

Dr. George Macnamara was part of a general practice dynasty in Corofin, County Clare that we are unlikely to see ever again. This dynasty began in 1826, when Michael Macnamara took up the position of dispensary doctor for the Corofin area at the tender age of 19 years and went on to serve his community uninterrupted for an astonishing 66 years. He had served an apprenticeship prior to taking up his post and his qualifying exams at the time took place in Latin. Of his children, six went on to qualify in medicine and all served with distinction in the Indian Medical Service except for the aforementioned George, the youngest, who took over his father's post on his death in 1892. During one of his early domiciliary visits, he was to meet his future wife, although clearly he would have had little idea at the time. In fact, uniquely enough, his first encounter with his wife to be, was when he delivered her, and sure enough, 18 years later they married and went on to have a family of 14 children.

When George died in 1919, so great was the esteem in which he was held by his patients that his coffin was carried rather

than drawn from the railway station to the church and from the church to the graveyard, a distance of 3 miles.

Only one of George's children studied medicine and thus, Donough Macnamara, took up his father's post in 1919 and went to serve the community of Corofin until his death in 1966 when he was succeeded by his son Maccon. Dr Maccon Macnamara, the fourth generation of this general practice dynasty, qualified at the National University of Ireland, Galway, and took over a practice which, at the time consisted largely of domiciliary calls. In fact, in 1969, not long after he began his practice, in the midst of a flu epidemic, he travelled 150 miles on house-calls in a single day over roads that were at best treacherous. In 1989, he had his first free Christmas day and went on to serve the community with distinction until his retirement in 2006.

Thus, this single community in the West of Ireland has been served uninterrupted for 180 years by four generations of the same family. Surely a record and if not, certainly a fine example of continuity of care! The current GPs in Corofin and the neighbouring parish of Ballyvaughan, Drs Fergus and Liam Glynn, are both grandsons of George Francis O' Loughlin born in the eye of that January storm of 1912.

Liam G Glynn and Fergus Glynn

Acknowledgements

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REFERENCE

1. O'Donohue, J. *Conamara Blues*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001.

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